

THE QUIVER

Saturday, October 10, 1868.



ESTHER WEST.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PEGGY OGLIVIE'S INHERITANCE."

CHAPTER I.—ESTHER THE QUEEN.

HURST COMMON was glowing in the golden afternoon. It was thickly set with furze, and the furze was in full bloom. At a little distance, it seemed a field of black embossed with gold.

Through the midst of it ran a broad green path, at one end of which, built upon a yellow sand-hill, stood a lonely house called "The Cedars," while at the other was the village of Hurst.

It was only two hours after noon, and the light that lay on the landscape had only gained in vividness from the touch of shade laid on here and there. But the low furze bushes cast no shade on that belt of shining green, soft as velvet, and elastic beneath the pressure of the feet. There was a pool at the village end, flashing like a mirror, and a flock of geese had risen from its margin, and, led by a mother goose, of most goose-like solemnity, proceeded up the path, as if out for a constitutional.

From the other end advanced a young girl—a figure on which the light rested lovingly, as it rests on a water-lily. There was something singularly pure and cool about Esther West: and yet she was no slender reed of a girl, but a tall and stately maiden, of ample proportions and perfect health. Perhaps it was to her proportion of face and figure, and also to a certain proportion of mind—which gave strength and calmness to all she did and said—that she owed her peculiar charm. I will try and describe her, for I do not hold with those who care not to paint the outward form. There was very little colour about her, yet she was not white. Though I never paint her mentally, but always sculpture her, if I may say so, she was not at all a marbly woman. Pure, tender greys predominated in her face; she had masses of shady hair, that was neither fair nor dark; long, lovely eye-brows of the same half-dusky hue, and grey eyes that seemed to swim in light, especially when they laughed. There was a great deal of shadow in the face; it was almost pensive in repose, but it lighted up marvellously when the grey eyes sparkled and the perfect nostril quivered; and the mouth, neither large nor small, but of a gracious sweetness, opened, and yet hardly showed the pearly teeth.

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It boasted also of a shop—"the shop," which was likewise the post-office of the district, both concerns being under the management of Mrs. Moss, though "old Moss," as her husband was called, still overlooked the transactions by means of a little square pane of glass let into the wall, through which he surveyed the world from his chimney-corner in the back parlour, to which he was confined by "rheumatiz" and increasing years.

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"There's one a waitin' for you—that is, for your mamma, Miss Esther. I've hardly had time to look at it yet," said Mrs. Moss, wiping her hands on her apron, and proceeding to look over a little bundle of letters. "Joe is just gettin' ready to take the letters round," she added (Joe was her son, and did the tailoring of the village up in his attic, besides his letter-carrying), "but maybe ye may like to carry it yourself. It's got the Australian post-mark on't." And she very naively had her look at it before she handed it over to its rightful owner.

Esther took it, hesitating just a little, and turning her face as she inspected the writing towards a little woman who stood in a corner, and who had stood back there since Esther entered the shop, with her sharp eyes fixed on the girl's face, and watching her every movement.

"Yes; I will take it," she said, after the momentary hesitation; and, with a kindly inquiry for Mr. Moss, she left the little shop, without having once looked in the direction of the small woman in the corner, partly out of pre-occupation, partly from good breeding.

There is no knowing what will please or what will offend some people. The little woman in the corner, who appeared to be dressed in every colour—not in the rainbow—was evidently offended that no notice had been taken of her; for as soon as Esther was out of hearing, she gave utterance to her verdict, with a sniff of her sharp nose and a screw of her shrewish little mouth.

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"There might be two Wests, but there can't be two Esthers, and two Harrys, and two Australias," said Mrs. Wiggett, showing herself a great inductive philosopher, and adding, triumphantly, "I know all about them."

"Do ye now!" exclaimed Mrs. Moss, with genuine admiration and curiosity; for not much was known about the Wests in the village, nor did there appear much to be known about a widow lady of good means and good manners, who had led a quiet life there for so many years.

Mrs. Moss waited open mouthed for further information; but it is doubtful if it would have been vouchsafed but for the interference of Mr. Moss, who once more lifted up his voice with—"I'm thinking, missus, ye've little to say about them; and nothing agin them."

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His tone of contradictoriness exasperated Mrs. Wiggett, and she burst out with, "That's all you know; but I come fra' the same place, and know all about them; and I can tell you," and her voice rose as her irritation carried her away, "that Miss Esther, as you call her, hasn't any right to the name o' West, no more nor I have."

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In the meantime, unconscious Esther, after hesitating another moment outside the shop door—as if drawn two ways at once—went on in the direction opposite from home, and towards a house on the other side of the village called Redhurst, where she was expected to join in a croquet party that sunny afternoon.

While she was still at some distance from the house, through the wicket-gate which opened into its shubbery came Constance Vaughan to meet her friend. She had on a hat, but neither cloak nor shawl, and her light dress fluttered as she advanced, with her own eager motion, rather than with the breeze. The girls met, and kissed each other, and then paused in the midst of the path.

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The girls stood where, through the trees, and over

the sloping shrubbery, they could be seen by the group assembled on the elevated lawn of Redhurst, and Constance insisted on making some telegraphic signals, by holding up the letter, and pointing in the direction of "The Cedars." The trees which gave their name to the house, could be seen from where they stood, stretching their dark, level boughs on the golden sky, the very symbols of rooted calm. The signals were quite intelligible and satisfactory to herself, and utterly incomprehensible to those to whom they were addressed; but a white handkerchief waved in reply was taken for a signal of comprehension; upon which they turned back deliberately, Constance linking her arm in Esther's, and fluttering gaily by her side.

CHAPTER II.

A LIFE'S HISTORY.

WHILE they are thus on their way, it may be as well to anticipate any further revelation through the medium of village gossip, and tell the story of Mrs. West's life in a clearer way—a story which, but for one great false step, might have been recorded in fewer words than most.

She was an orphan, remembering neither father nor mother, and married in early life to a manufacturer in the north of England. A woman who must have been made timid by the repression of natural affection in childhood and youth, for it was not in her husband's home that she learnt to distrust her power to win and retain the love of others. Her husband idolised her, childless wife as she was. She had more than the ordinary share of intellect, but her affections were stronger still, quite preponderating over the powers of her mind. Her tenderness was of the kind which even borders on pain in its intensity. After many years of married life, there came to her the promise of a child, and, even by anticipation, the love of the mother sprang up in her heart, with all the power of loving which characterised her.

Close to the gate of the grounds which separated her large and lonely house from the outer world, stood a pretty cottage, the home of a recently-married pair, which she had often looked at wistfully as she saw the young mother fondle her firstborn. Then the little thing began to totter about in the porch, or on the small grass-plot in front of the house, and the lady would stop to speak to the child and its mother over the low garden gate. But now she lingered longer, and almost trembled with joy to hold the yearling in her arms; and, seeing her daily, the little mouth was held up freely for her kisses, and a very lovely little mouth it was.

The mother of this child had been the village schoolmistress, and, herself remarkably handsome, had married the handsomest man in the parish, though he was only a bricklayer. Neighbours said she might have looked higher, their shades of high and low being of the finest; but Martin Potter was

intelligent and ambitious, and they changed their opinion in time. He was a student in his way, and a saver, and when he married he became a small master, and, with his wife still mistress of the school, they seemed prospering exceedingly. Then came the baby, and the mother's health failed for a time, and the school had to be given up, and the schoolhouse with it. But Martin built a pretty cottage for his wife and child, and worked harder for them, and seemed to love them more than ever.

A great disappointment awaited Mrs. West: her baby was only born to die. The little pale blossom fell from the tree of life fruitless, unexpanded. Very slowly the childless mother came back to life and health. When she began once more to pass the gate of her domain, there was little Esther, lovelier than ever, playing in the porch, and her (in Mrs. West's eyes) most happy mother with one infant in her lap and another in a wicker cradle at her feet: Mr. Potter had been presented with twin daughters.

At first, Mrs. West had to be driven past her humble neighbour's door, with bent head, and clasped hands, and heart aching heavily. She could not have trusted herself to speak; though she blamed herself for every throb of what seemed so like envy, and doubled her pain by being pained because of it. But at length she had the courage to stop her pony-carriage and step into the cottage; and with tears falling into the bosom of the little white bundle in her lap, pour out her sorrow to a sympathising listener. Mary Potter was beginning to have her troubles too, and expressed a very sincere wish, concerning the twins, that one of them had been Mrs. West's instead of her own. "Not that I would like to part with one now," she corrected; "but Martin thinks it hard to have two at a time. He thinks he'll never get on at this rate." Thus poor Mary bared her secret hurt.

After that, Mrs. West would stop at the cottage door, and take little Esther up for a drive. And from that, she got to having her at the house, where she was made much of, amused, and, what is even pleasanter to a very young child, instructed; the instruction being confined, however, to the simple use of words. She was not two years old; and the twins had left no room for her in the mother's arms; had "put her little nose out of joint," to use the common phrase; therefore it was no wonder that she clung more and more to the gentle lady, who gave her a mother's care, and all the love that she was ready to have lavished on her own. More and more the unconscious little one was weaned from her mother and her home; till one day, Martin Potter being employed on some repairs at "The House," Mrs. West made him a proposal to keep the child altogether, and to bring it up in her own house. "You are likely to have a large family"—Martin Potter thought it more than likely—"and you would never miss her; while she would be amply provided

for. I have consulted my husband, and I want you to consult your wife before you answer me."

"Oh, Martin! it is hard to part with our own flesh and blood to a stranger, even if she were an angel from heaven," pleaded poor Mary, hugging her twins.

Her husband briefly pointed out the advantages to the child herself, and to the whole family. Mr. and Mrs. West might die. They were neither young nor strong, and they would certainly leave a fortune to their adopted child.

But the more advantageous it seemed, the more it seemed to the mother to separate her from her child. She was weak and irritable, and not inclined to be reasonable about it. "She's our first," she sobbed; "and you've never taken to the twins as you took to her." She appealed to the father's joy in his first-born. The first and strongest link between them seemed about to be broken; but when Mary Potter found that nothing prevailed against her husband's resolution, she calmed herself, and said, "Take your own way, Martin; but, mind, it's against my will."

"Take your own way!" Sad and fatal words for either husband or wife to utter; the way that leads to many a dreary separation. Those whom God hath joined together have no longer a right to a way of their own. Slowly, but surely, Mary and Martin Potter diverged from that day. There had come

"The little rift within the lute,
Which by-and-by shall make the music mute,
And, slowly widening, slowly silence all."

Mary had a little soreness against Mrs. West, but, strangely enough, that wore away, while the soreness against her husband increased. Mrs. West was very good to Mary, especially when another baby came; she was good in a way which would have won harder hearts than this young mother's. It was a deprecating way she had. Anybody might have patronised Mrs. West, but she could not have patronised the poorest or feeblest. It was delicate, too. She did not present her humble friend with stout flannel petticoats or serviceable gowns; all her presents were such as one lady might give to another. She worked for the twins, with her own delicate fingers, dresses of simple material, but dainty form and ornament, such as she would have had her own child wear, and such as she provided for little Esther; and she contrived, above all, that the mother should see her child every day, except when she was taken away for a few months at a time when they went to the sea for the benefit of Mr. West's health.

They took little Esther away, and they brought her back again more beautiful and blooming than ever, while the twins were weak, and fretful, and ailing.

Another daughter had been added to Martin Potter, who felt more aggrieved than ever at the

Providence which assigned him the encumbrance of four of the weaker sex. Indeed, he could hardly be got to look upon the face of his fourth daughter. Esther seemed, therefore, wholly given up to her adopted parents; indeed, such had been the compact between them and Martin Potter, with the proviso that he should see her from time to time, and that he might claim her again if he chose.

Another winter drew near, and Mr. West was ordered to the south before it should set in. Mary Potter, expecting another baby, bade good-bye to little Esther without much concern, while Martin, keeping still better to his bargain, hardly noticed the child at all; but then he had borrowed money from Mr. West lately, who had said to his wife on the occasion, "My darling, I fear that man will be a trouble to us some day."

They stayed throughout the winter and the long, cold spring at Ventnor; but before the latter season was over, Mr. West was too ill to be moved. Periodically Mrs. West wrote to the Potters concerning their child, and received at equal intervals a letter from Mary. Number five had turned out a boy; "but," wrote poor Mary, "nothing will please him (her husband), for the business seems going wrong." And Mrs. West sent the boy a handsome sum of money as a gift from his sister Esther, in answer to the intimation.

Just before the summer, Mr. West died, leaving all that he possessed to his wife, and after his wife to the son of an only brother in Australia. The will had been made, according to their mutual wish, years before the adoption of Esther, and had remained unaltered. "You will take care of the little one," the dying man had said, for he had come to be as fond of Esther as his wife was. "I fear you will find it a hard task to keep her, and I don't quite like Martin Potter, but it would be cruel to give her up now."

Give her up! Mrs. West would have given up most things in this life, after her husband's death, life itself, rather than have given up the clasp of those chubby arms, the kiss of those pretty lips, the love of that warm little heart.

Then came the great temptation to which she yielded. The Potters left the place where they had lived so many years for a neighbouring town, where small building speculations were rife. Mrs. West sold her house and furniture through an agent, and thus broke the tie with it at the same time. Still she remained at Ventnor, but poor Mary grew remiss in writing, and, after a longer interval than usual, the fatal step was taken—fatal, at least, to the peace of poor Mrs. West. She removed from the Isle of Wight, and came into the neighbourhood of London, without communicating to the Potters her change of address. Her late husband's nephew and heir had been sent to England for education, and she gave to herself the reason that she desired to make a home

for him during his stay. By this, also, she accounted to herself for her frequent changes of residence. She was always finding out a better school for Harry. After three years, the young Australian was recalled, having spent a year at three different schools. He was a bright, handsome, fair-haired, restless boy, and, to do Mrs. West justice, the frequent changes were as much his fault as hers. He needed a discipline far firmer than any she could enforce to repress his erratic tendencies; but he learnt so rapidly and retentively, that what would have hindered the progress of most lads only seemed to favour his, and everybody seemed satisfied with the result. Little Esther was Harry's playfellow, or rather plaything, during those years. He alternately loved her and broke her child heart by his neglect; but then he was her senior by six years, and it was not to be expected that a boy could make a companion of a mere baby of a girl. So the only memories cherished of Harry by Mrs. West and Esther were pleasant and happy ones.

Finally, Mrs. West—all trace of the Potters lost—had settled at Hurst, and Esther had grown up, knowing nothing of her origin, and loving her whom she called mother with an undivided love. Her memory carried her back to Harry, and to many a little incident of his stay with them, and especially to the day of his departure. It had been a tradition of her childish days that he was to come back and marry her when he grew a man, and though it was a long time since any one had reminded her of it, she still remembered the promise and the day when it

was made: the great ship, and being lifted down into a little boat, and stretching out her arms towards Harry, standing waving his cap round his sunny head, and laughing at her tears and terrors.

She might have remembered things still further back, even so far back as her parting with her mother, but the memory is capricious in respect of events which occur before one is five years old. It retains only the merest fragments, and if these are broken off completely from the after series of events and actors, they are speedily effaced.

The completeness of her success in the appropriation of Esther, had cut off Mrs. West from any retreat from her false position. If the child had remembered anything, something might have been explained and a truer position assumed, but how tell the loving and trusting girl that she had no claim to her love and trust. It was too late! Often repeated words of saddest significance, "Too late!"

Mrs. West's hope lay in Harry. She, too, remembered his boyish promise, and counted eagerly on its fulfilment. When he came back—and he was coming soon—she would set all right. In giving up the love, for whose sake she had sinned, she would unburden her soul of the secret under which it had so long lain trembling. Everything was left till Harry came; then Esther's future would be secure; then she would seek out the Potters, and make amends for the past. And at length the time for all these things was at hand.

(To be continued.)

FREEDOM BY THE TRUTH.

I.—HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

THE truth," said the Lord Jesus, "shall make you free" (John viii. 32). But free from what?—from sin? Yes, free from sin: for he goes on to explain that "whosoever committeth sin is the slave of sin," and that only He, who is the Truth and came to bear witness to the truth, can free men from that base servitude. But we do not thus exhaust the meaning of his words. What he promises to those who continue in the truth is, not only freedom from sin, but absolute and perfect freedom; freedom from every form of bondage, from every shackle that galls and fetters the native motions of the soul; freedom from the bondage of sense, from the evil force of custom and habit, from the fear of man and the fear of death, from the burden of tradition and the yoke of law; freedom in every kind—perfect, absolute liberty, is the gift of Him who is the Truth.

It is a large promise; but has it not been veri-

fied? Think what Christ the Truth did for the Twelve who first followed him. They were simple, illiterate men, enslaved by many passions, many customs, many maxims, many fears. The priest and the rabbi looked down upon them with contempt as "altogether born in sin." And though, like the other peasants and fishermen of their time, they may have had their rude private jokes against Pharisee and priest, they nevertheless looked up to them as the depositaries of a sacred wisdom, or as wielding an almost magical power over the spiritual interests of men. Which of them, before he knew Christ, would have dared to call his soul his own, or to oppose the dictates of priest or rabbi? Not one of them. Even after they had lived with Christ for many months—for they did not know him as he was till he had left them—his audacity in opposing his authority to the priestly authority made them shiver with apprehension; they were for ever dissuading him from the dangerous course he seemed bent on taking.

Their deference to mere *wealth*, again, was abject to a degree which would be surprising if we did not see a deference as abject every day. As the rich man swept by in his robes of Egyptian linen and Tyrian purple, they did him obeisance as a being of higher nature and worth than themselves. They could hardly believe their ears, when Jesus said it was very hard for a rich man to be good. They were amazed. They asked, "Who, then, can be saved? If there is little chance for him, there is none for us." It seemed to them that the rich man was to have the best of the next world as well as the best of this; that, if the wealthy were not to be saved, the poor and needy would very certainly be lost.

How came they by such a thought? It was not suggested by their Scriptures. The Hebrew Scriptures, so far from teaching that the rich were the favourites of Heaven, show everywhere a very special tenderness for the poor, the afflicted, the needy, and him that hath no helper. So far from hinting that the opulent, by their costly sacrifices and vows, secured the goodwill of God, the Hebrew Scriptures said very plainly that, obedience was better than sacrifice—that God cared nothing for sacrifices, save as they expressed a docile loving heart. How, then, came the disciples, in common with all the Jewish poor, to think of the rich, simply because they were rich, with an awe that would be ludicrous were it not so pitiable? They had learned it from the traditions which made void the law. These traditions, as the work of the priests, naturally put great value on the punctual and generous payment of tithes, offerings, vows, and on the wealth which enabled men to cast rich gifts into the treasury. And these traditions had invaded every province of human life; making every day of the week rigid and unlovely. On the Sabbath, for instance, no man might light a fire, or walk more than a few furlongs, or carry a little food to a sick neighbour. On other days, every joint they ate must have passed through the priest's diminishing hands, and the garden-herbs which came to table with it must have paid tithe to him; the garments they wore must be of a certain pattern, and hue, and substance, and must contain certain threads and fringes. At some seasons, a man might not so much as kiss his wife or fondle his children. An iron rule—the rule of the priesthood—extended over all forms, and relations, and intercourses of life. To sin against it was to sin against an authority the most august; it was to become singular; it was to be condemned as wicked. And to this rule the disciples submitted till Christ set them free; till he led them through corn-fields, and taught them to succour the afflicted, on the Sabbath-day; till he set them the example of eating with publicans

and sinners, laying hands on the leper, and loving the Samaritan or the Gentile no less than the Jew.

Before they knew the truth, moreover, they were in bondage to their own evil passions. Do you know what the morals of many a fishing-village are like? You may be very sure that they were no purer in Galilee, under an Eastern sky and in the wickedest age the world has seen, than they are now in England, and under our temperate clime. If Renan were writing an opera, or composing a ballet, instead of penning a "Life of Jesus," he might be pardoned for giving us idyllic scenes, in which an innocent and gay peasantry are animated only by the purest motives and the most beautiful sentiments. But when he is dealing with historical facts, with the villages round the sea of Tiberias in the first century, and represents the peasants and fishermen of that time and place as men who were likely to *originate* the pure and lofty morality of the Gospel, he offends not more against his own learning than against the common sense of mankind. Rude and illiterate fishermen, in a licentious age, inhabiting a province notorious for ignorance and vice—such men were Peter, and Andrew, and John, and James; and they must have known, only too well, how depraved the heart of man can be. Matthew, moreover, was a publican; and we know that the publicans were selfish and extortionate apostates. One is tempted to think that Iscariot also must have been a publican—he seems to have been so admirably fitted for that line of life. And it is an old belief of the Church, that Simon *Zelotes*, another of the apostolic band, was one of the *Zealots*, who stuck at nothing, not even murder or assassination; a bandit living a wild, lawless life, and engaging in secret plots against the political authorities. Men such as these must have had much to learn and much to unlearn, before they were set free from even the grosser vices and sins. And there were other passions which fettered them when these baser passions were brought into captivity. Take, for instance, St. Peter's rash impetuosity, the impulsive unenduring heat of nature, which was for ever urging him into extremes. Into what a grievous bondage that brought him, and how grievously he felt it! How often it overmastered his holiest impulses, and thwarted his best intentions, his strongest resolves! Was it nothing to be set free from that;—to grow, as beneath the influence of the truth he did grow, into a calm, resolute man, holding all the wild forces and vagrant impulses of his nature well in hand, and devoting himself, body, soul, and spirit, to an aim as lofty as man ever had?

Again: *death* was very terrible to the Jew. No doubt there are intimations even in the Old Testament Scriptures of a life beyond the grave. No

doubt "the resurrection" was an accepted tenet in one, and that the largest and most popular, school of Hebrew thought. But what assurance of the future was a rough ignorant peasant likely to feel when school was ranged against school, and learned Pharisee encountered learned Sadducee, the one holding that there was, the other contending that there was not, a resurrection and a life for the dead? Even if his heart inclined to the larger hope, was there much warmth or comfort in the thought that the dead he loved were gathered in some shadowy garden, far beneath the solid earth, or that they lay asleep, diverted by pleasant dreams; or that they wandered, thin shadows, through a world as unsubstantial as themselves; and that, if he were very good and very observant of the priest, he might some day join them? With a doubt in his heart, or with no better hope than this, is it any wonder that he was all his lifetime in bondage to the fear of death? To be freed from that fear, as thousands were by Christ the Truth; to be enfranchised into happy certainty, into a sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection and of life eternal—was not that much—was it not all?

No, it was not all: for, besides the sure hope for the future, there was a present deliverance far greater than any to which I have yet referred—viz., freedom from law. So long as men are good simply because they must, or ought to, be good; so long as the law is outside them—a thing to be thought of, and remembered, and obeyed with difficulty or reluctance, they have not the full and entire freedom of the truth. They will be haunted by the fear of forgetfulness, the fear of failure, the fear of punishment; and where fear is, there are bondage and torment. Before they can be free, they must have the law within them, written on their minds and on their hearts. It must no longer be imposed upon them by an external authority, or obeyed with reluctance and effort; they must have become a law to themselves; their will must have become so at one with God's will, that their obedience is instinctive and unconscious, effortless and inevitable. This is the last attainment of piety, the crowning liberty of perfect freedom. But even thus far Christ the Truth made his apostles free. They could not only do God's will, but prefer it to their own, rejoice in doing it, nay, rejoice in dying to make it known and loved by their fellow-men. It even seemed that "the law was dead" to them, and they to the law; that it was no longer they who lived, but Christ who lived in them, and, in the unfolding energies of his Spirit, carried them to those heights in which obedience is at once a supreme necessity and a supreme joy.

Christ set them free. As they grew to know him, every bond which galled them was broken in

sunder. Their evil lusts were subdued; the very defects of their unbalanced natures were corrected. They walked erect, free from all fear of man. Wealth could not awe them, nor priestly authority, nor rank, nor even the current habits of the time. They met kings and judges with a spirit as high and regal as their own. They paid, and were conscious that they paid, to God a worship loftier than that of the Temple hierarchy; they out-taught, and knew that they out-taught, the rabbis; they rose above all reach of law in virtue of an obedience as prompt, and instinctive, and affectionate as that of gracious childhood. So far from fearing death, they stood "ready to be offered up," nay, "longing to depart" and be with Christ, knowing very well that to die was to enter on a life more vivid and intense, more varied, and noble, and joyful.

Do any ask, "*How* were they lifted from a bondage so manifold to a freedom so entire?" The answer is simple and direct: "*The truth made them free.*" Do any ask, "*But what truth?*" the answer is still plain: "*The word spoken by Christ, continuing in which they knew the truth, and were his disciples indeed.*" But if any ask, "*What was the word that Christ spoke, and how did it operate toward freedom?*" the answer is more complex and difficult; for it impairs the force of the answer to omit from it a single truth Christ taught, since the whole body of his truth hangs together in a vital unity. But though our answer have the less force, it may have a sufficient force if we say, "*The truth Christ taught, and by which he set men free was this: that God was their Father and Saviour, that he really loved them, and would make any sacrifice to ransom them from evil. The truth he taught was, that to love God and his neighbour with all his heart, was the whole duty of man. The truth he taught men was, that heaven was their home, the home in which they would dwell with God for ever, if only they accepted his salvation, and were diligent to discharge the duty of love.*"

Christ taught this truth—nay, rather, Christ was this truth; it was incarnate in him. He taught the Father's saving care for us, by the tenderness he showed to children, to the poor and sick and needy, to the unrighteous and the lost; by his personal dependence on the care of his Father in heaven by becoming a willing sacrifice for our sins. If Christ were God, and God would die for us, what is there that he would not do? If the Father loved the Son, and yet gave him up for us all, what is there that he would not give? The Son taught us to love God and our neighbour by himself loving God with a love stronger than death, and by invariably preferring every man before himself. He taught us that heaven is our home, by taking our nature up into heaven, by conquering death and hades, by laying down a path of life



(Drawn by C. GREEN.)

"One-handed vase, that like a fair girl stands,
With white arm looped unto her side."—p. 14.

through the great darkness, by shedding down from heaven the gifts and graces by which we are made meet to enter it.

How, then, could those who knew Christ the Truth but rise above all fear? What to them was the judgment of men, however wise or sacred, as compared with the approval of their God and Father? What was the wealth of the rich as compared with the treasure they were laying up with him? What did it matter that they were poor and despised, the contempt of the schools, the execration of the synagogue, that they had to pass through "afflictions, necessities, distresses;" to endure "stripes, imprisonments, labours, watchings, fastings," if in all these they could serve God and man? What was it to them that the tent in which they tabernacled was dissolved, when they knew that they had a building of God, a temple not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens? To men who have learned the great secret of life, who, though sorrowful, are always rejoicing; though poor, make many rich; though having nothing, possess all things; though dying, yet, behold, they live: to men such as these there is no more any fear, and therefore no bondage. The truth has made them free, and they are free indeed.

How is it, then, that *we* are not free—we who love the truth? That we are not free, we must sorrowfully admit: for who is there among us who does not defer to high rank or great wealth with an excessive deference? Which of us is not in bondage to some great teacher, priest, or rabbi of past or present times, accepting his conclusions, not because we have tested them and found them true, but because they are his, or we think they are? Which of us is not in bondage to the maxims and customs of the society in which we live—suffering them to prescribe our dress, our looks, our hours, our hospitality, the whole outward form of our life; not because we always think them wise or wholesome, but because we do not dare to be singular? Which of us is not the slave of his own passions and frailties and defects, suffering that in us to rule which should only serve? Which of us is altogether free from the fear of death? And, alas! how many of us have learned to do God's will as though it were our own will;

not from fear, but from love; not with reluctance and difficulty, but with an instinctive certainty, a healthy unconsciousness, a constant alacrity and joy?

The fault is not in the truth, and cannot be; for that has made other men free from the very bonds in which we are held. Nay, we know and admit that the fault is not in the truth,—that did we but abide in the word of Christ, it would set us free. We cannot but see that if we really believed God to be our Father and Saviour, that to love him and our neighbour was our one all-including duty, that to die was to go home to the life of heaven, we should at once lose all fear of man and of death, of loss and of change. We should be free as the apostles were free, as Christ himself was free. We know that nothing but the truth of Christ can give us the freedom we crave; we know that if we were only to receive his truth, and give it full play, perfect absolute freedom would be ours.

But, ah! what an "only" that is! How hard it is for us to detach ourselves from the influence of tradition, of habit, of the vast and complex social order in which we live, of the senses and the prejudices we have so long indulged! We are slaves at heart, although we long to be free; we love some of our chains too well to part with them, although, when they gall us, we cry out for liberty. Let us take heart from the story of the Twelve. Christ was very patient with them. It was not in a day that they rose to freedom. They often blundered, often relapsed, often hugged the chains which the truth came to strike from them. Their task was as hard as ours, and as tedious, and often seemed as hopeless. And Christ will be patient with us—will have "long patience," if only our hearts point to truth and freedom. And he will be helpful as well as patient, teaching us truth as we are able to bear it, bestowing grace on grace as we can use it, leading us step by step as we can take it. Let us put our trust in him, let us steadfastly believe that he can set us free, and try to become free, and try again; and, at last, after many failures, many relapses, many sorrows and remorses, we shall rise to the perfect liberty of a perfect obedience.

MISS JULIA.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "MARY POWELL."



WHEN I was told that Miss Julia was very peculiar, I understood what I was meant to understand, that Miss Julia was very trying and disagreeable. Mrs. Turquand would not have said so in direct terms upon any account; but she conveyed a damaging impression of her all the

same. It is a conventional expression, usually received with a conventional smile, and is capable of as much misinterpretation as suits the malice or vivid imagination of the person addressed. That person, if reluctant, like myself, to receive and pass on innuendoes, simply lets the matter drop; but if of a gossiping turn, as is too likely

to be the case, speedily carries it to others. Thus, I knew almost for certain that such and such neighbours would soon inform their intimates that Mrs. Turquand was going to have her husband's niece Miss Julia to live with her, now that old Miss Turquand was dead, and that it was natural for poor Mrs. Turquand to be rather nervous about it, as Miss Julia was so very peculiar.

That was what came to pass. I heard it with my own ears. It was brought to me as a piece of news, though I am notoriously a non-conductor. The monosyllable 'so' gave force to the assertion. Next I heard from some one else, that Miss Julia Turquand, who was soon coming among us, was unlikely to be popular, for that *it was said* she was of a very odd temper, different from other persons, and of course very difficult to live with. I inquired, "Who said it? who knows her here?"

"Not a creature but Mrs. Turquand."

"Does Mrs. Turquand then spread such a report of her niece, who is coming to live with her?"

"Oh, dear, Mrs. Turquand has spread no report!" said my visitor precipitately, "she is the very last person to do such a thing. Pray don't set it about that I accused her of it. She is amiability itself, and therefore it is that one feels it so annoying that an inmate of peculiar temper should come to invade her—placidity."

I had never heard such a word before, though I knew very well what was meant. I said, without much interest, "In what does Miss Julia's peculiarity consist?"

"That we have yet to learn," said Mrs. Guy. "Unless she is much on her guard, it will soon break out."

"Perhaps she may prove peculiarly agreeable."

"My dear Mrs. Cheerlove! Well, I'm paying you quite a visitation. Good morning."

Thus it befell, that by the time Miss Julia made her appearance among us, the notion already formed of her by the ladies of Tattleton was anything but favourable, and all through the incaution of Mrs. Turquand. Set a stone rolling, and it will soon find its way downhill, and make a splash in the puddle at the bottom.

Such a soft-spoken, gentle-looking little widow as Mrs. Turquand was! The general impression of her was that she would not kill a fly. No more she would, I dare say, in the Nero fashion, for the mere pleasure of extinguishing the vital spark, though I've seen her kill caterpillars, which, as every gardener knows, deserve war to the knife. The general impression of her, which she pretty well deserved, was, that she was so considerate and tender-hearted, that she would not, if possible, hurt any living creature in the slightest possible manner. Then why did not she recollect what Iago said?—

"—He that flitches from me my good name,
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed."

Why, in her deceased husband's time, had she continually confided to her acquaintance that he was "always complaining?" Why possess them of the knowledge that her faithful, excellent housemaid could, on occasion, "show temper," with the addition, "but I always make allowances?" and why had she now gone setting it about that Miss Julia was "peculiar?" Why, but for the ignoble, unacknowledged end of making herself out to be going in for minor martyrdom.

But what! may not one speak? Certainly one may, if there is need; otherwise, if the communication is not quite safe, it is so much better to hold one's tongue. What good is there in outsiders knowing that some human errors fall to the lot of husband, niece, or servant, and letting them brood on it, and magnify it, and talk of it to others, when it is no concern of theirs? Better let them find it out for themselves; and perhaps they never *will* find it out, and then the scandal is saved. It was not so in the case of Miss Julia.

Perhaps I am hammering this nail in a little too hard, and might spare noise and trouble; but when I think it all over, I cannot help chafing to think how things went, and how they might have gone better.

Miss Julia did not come quite as soon as expected, and when she did come, I was apprised of it through our vicar, Mr. Hillyard, who came about the Shoe Club. He had had a short holiday, and looked all the better for it, for, poor man, he was sadly overdone sometimes. When the business was settled, he enjoyed talking over his little trip, and presently said—

"Oh, by-the-by, I had a very pleasant travelling companion in the train coming home—a niece of Mrs. Turquand's."

I said, "Oh! what is she like?"

"Do you mean in appearance? I can't go into details of eyes, hair, and so forth; but she struck me as very lady-like and prepossessing."

"But her conversation—her style—"

"Above what one ordinarily meets with. Certainly a cultivated mind, and a just way of thinking. I don't know when I have been more pleased on short acquaintance."

"That is saying a good deal, Mr. Hillyard."

"I assure you it is no more than I think. Mrs. Turquand is fortunate in having so intelligent a visitor."

This prepared me to be pleased with Miss Julia, whom I speedily called on. I found her winding crimson netting silk for a purse, while Mrs. Turquand was arranging flowers; both of them looking very comfortable and amicable. We got on very well, skimming over the topics of the day, on which

Miss Julia now and then made a remark less commonplace than I was accustomed to in Tattleton. I noticed no peculiarity in her, unless that she was peculiarly well-bred and rather quiet and serious. She might be twenty-six or twenty-eight; was a pale brunette, with dark-grey eyes and a pretty mouth. I thought, "This young lady will not set the world on fire, but she is certainly above the average."

During a previous call, Mrs. Turquand had shown me the room she was preparing with really sedulous care for her expected guest. It was small, and with rather limited wardrobe arrangements, but commanded a very pretty look-out; and in the window was set a small table, with a very large, heavy looking-glass on it, which Mrs. Turquand evidently piqued herself on. She made me observe what a fine plate it was, and there was another glass at the right angle for catching the back-front of one's head, which she complacently said was so very convenient for dressing one's back-hair. I inwardly hoped Miss Julia might not inadvertently upset the little table, and that the great glass might not thereby sustain a downfall.

My call was returned; and thus far all were pleasant and pleased. The ladies of Tattleton observed that they really could detect nothing amiss in Miss Julia, and were warm in their civilities. She did not respond to them with quite as much alacrity as they expected and wished, and this set them on reconsidering her at all points and revising their judgment. Why should she be exclusive? They were good enough for her aunt, therefore they surely were for her. As to her saying she was a poor visitor, that was all nonsense; the forms of society required keeping up; an aged aunt was no such serious loss that her death should excuse one from observances of politeness.

Then it was found that she was fond of going to church on week-days, whenever the doors were open. This savoured of being righteous over-much; they hoped she might not prove High Church, and in training for a pervert. Mrs. Turquand had let fall that she secluded herself much in her room; they wondered whether there were anything penitential in it connected with sackcloth and knotted cords. If she *did* indulge in anything of that kind, you know—people seldom did without some good reason.

A much more mundane reason for her immoderate church-going was presently found out—that she was setting her cap at the vicar. This was enough to make all the Tattleton ladies faint away as one woman, on the spot. That that dear hallowed man, whom they all considered as sacred, who had been so subdued by the death of his wife, and so touchingly endeavoured to supply her

place to his little children, should be the victim of scheming, was really sickening. He had been seen to take off his hat to her, to shake hands with her (and her aunt), and had actually been heard to speak of her in terms of cordial approbation. *That* was what came of the church-going! and that he whom every mamma had so religiously abstained from inviting to croquet and kettledrum for fear of the world's talk, should now fall helplessly into the snares of a designing young person—not so very young, neither! Mrs. Guy had thought of sounding him on the subject of possible sackcloth and ashes, but nothing of that kind would do now. Probably his feeling heart had been bought over by rich donations to his charities—for the impression (totally without data) was that Miss Julia was very rich.

However, it came out in course of time, that she was rather poor; and then public opinion, after being brought up short for a while, with suspended breath, took a different course, and treated her with contemptuous indifference. She might be as peculiar now as she liked, there was no danger to Mr. Hillyard. As Mr. Hillyard was not a mercenary man, this did not seem to be a *sequitur*.

But before things reached this point, I paid Mrs. Turquand another visit. The poor lady came to me in a state so different from her usual *placitudo* (I thank thee, Guy, for coining me that word—evidently a compound of placidity and solitude) that I was in pain for her.

"Oh," said she, piteously, seating herself close beside me and speaking in almost a whisper, "you recollect that glass, and the pains I took to place it at the right angle? Julia will not have it, she has begged me to take it away; she says it quite annoys her to see duplicates of herself every time she looks up, and that she wants the table for writing! It is *not* a writing-table, you know; and in this room is a davenport replete with everything she can want!"

I said, "Perhaps she cannot write in a room with other people—many cannot."

"Well, all I know is, it's very disappointing and disagreeable, such pains as I took; and you know it, my dear friend. There was not a thing in that room that I did not put in a new place. And I must say it's very unsociable for a visitor to sit writing in her room instead of here, where I don't interrupt in the least. One might as well have no companion. But" (with a sigh and a smile) "dear Julia is so peculiar!"

I was sorry for Mrs. Turquand, and did what I could to smooth matters, by saying that when a visitor came for a long stay, it was often an advantage rather than otherwise for her to have some independent source of occupation which took her off her hostess's hands. Mrs. Turquand ad-

mitted that it was so, and recovered her equanimity; but chiefly, I think, by recourse to her old axiom, that Julia was so very peculiar.

From what was dropped by others, I gleaned that this seclusion in her own room rather gained on Miss Julia, to the serious annoyance of Mrs. Turquand; and I did not know what to think of it. One day it explained itself. I was calling on Mrs. Turquand, and listening, as usual, to her gentle murmurs, when Miss Julia entered, looking quite bright, and said: "Now, aunt, if you will be good enough to come up-stairs, you shall see what you shall see—Oh, I did not know you were here, Mrs. Cheerlove"—and the bright look disappeared.

"Pray, do not let me be a hindrance," said I; "I will wait here as long as you like, or go away, unless I may come too."

"Oh, you may if you like," said she, rather embarrassed, "for you are always so kind, only it is nothing that *you* will think much of."

I was excessively curious to know what it was, so I rose with alacrity and accompanied them up-stairs, and, as we went, Miss Julia said with pleasant frankness—

"Poor Harry's widow is in very narrow circumstances, and now it is time for the children to leave off their mourning, she has nothing to put them into, and they have grown out of all their old things, so I have been making them new ones, but I'm afraid I've not made them very nicely."

"My dear Julia, what a darling you are!" cried Mrs. Turquand, throwing her arms round her, and giving her two or three hearty kisses. I declare the tears started into my eyes, at her sudden appreciation of the good girl, along with the other circumstances of the case.

Children's things are always so pretty; and there, on the snowy counterpane, were laid out two complete suits for each of the little dears, most beautifully made.

"My dearest Julia, why should not you have made these charming things down-stairs?"

"Oh, aunt, they would have made such a litter, and people are always coming in."

I left them in the midst of their cordiality, and went home in a very cheerful mood. Alas! it was soon clouded. What mischief ensues from idle complaints! My old friend, Mrs. Rowe, came to me with trouble on her good-tempered face, and said, "How vexed I am about this affair of Miss Turquand's!"

"What affair?" said I, in dismay.

"You know Mr. Hillyard looks in on me, now and then, as an old friend, and talks to me almost as if I were his mother, sometimes about his children and sometimes about himself. Ever

since Miss Julia came to Mrs. Turquand's, I have observed with pleasure a growing partiality for her, and have done what little I could to increase it. Lately he told me, with some embarrassment, that he was thinking of her as his wife. I had hardly given him a look of pleasure and approval, when we were interrupted by visitors, and I have never seen him since. But meanwhile, Dr. Blagge, who really is as great a gossip as a woman, and quite in Mrs. Turquand's interest, has told him all sorts of things about Miss Julia's peculiar ways, secluding herself in her room, and so forth, and made him quite reluctantly come to the conclusion that she would not make his little folks happy. I am of a different opinion myself, but what can I say? Nothing that will weigh against Mrs. Turquand's very injudicious and unfair complaints."

"My dear Mrs. Rowe," said I, "if Mr. Hillyard but knew what I know, the scale containing those complaints would fly up to the beam in an instant."

"Hark, there is his knock," said she, looking excited. "I dare say he is coming to talk it over with me. Don't go away."

Under ordinary circumstances I should certainly have gone directly, but I thought it best in this instance to keep my ground for a few minutes; so I faced Mr. Hillyard's annoyed look when he saw me; and Mrs. Rowe, retaining his hand to make sure of his not retreating, said, "I am so glad you are come, I want to have a talk with you by-and-by."

"And I am just going," said I, rising; then with the most natural air in the world, "Oh, by-the-way, before I go, I must tell you of the pleasing little scene I witnessed just now at Mrs. Turquand's;" and then, addressing myself to Mrs. Rowe all the while, though Mr. Hillyard listened intently to every word, I related with great glee the unfolding of Miss Julia's little mystery, the delight and affection of her aunt, and my own enjoyment of it, saying, "It was so completely like her, you know!" and then went off in secret triumph, thinking I had achieved a good stroke of business.

In fact, Miss Julia's real friends succeeded in effacing the wrong impressions her nominal friends had spread abroad of her, and in a very little while the latter had something else to talk about—viz., that whether or no Miss Julia had had designs on the vicar, she was now the woman of his choice, and he her accepted husband. An excellent wife she has since been to him, and a most admirable step-mother to his children; and I suppose I am the only one who now remembers the foolish and unkind things that used to be said about Miss Julia being very peculiar.

AN ANTIQUE VASE.

ONE-HANDLED vase, that like a fair girl stands,
 With white arm looped unto her side, before
 An evening well amid the villaged lands,
 Listening to hear her lover's step once more,
 While rural altars fume along the sands,
 And from the wavy deep the fisher's oar—
 How long since thou in some Achæan home
 Stood water-brimm'd, have rolled away the years,
 While the barbarian, swarming, ruined Rome,
 Buried beneath the wrecks of house and shrine
 Those graven groups upon thy marble sides—
 That veiled maiden, wounded and in tears,
 By yonder little Cupid shape divine;
 That tiny joking boy-bird with loosed bow,
 From whose broad, merry forehead laughing
 curls
 Hung round his cheek in tumbles, quivering from the
 blow;

And what that other group that near them glides?
 Bacchantes they, careering in mad whirls
 Along the beaten grass,
 With all the raptures and the grace of wine,
 With jars, and flutes, and cymbals round and round,
 Some holding each their hair, elate or bowed,
 Elastic-footed to the measure bound,
 And with robes flying, floating gestures pass,
 Like some white drift of stormy autumn cloud.
 And last, what shapes of youth and age I see?
 A marble image of sweet Summer, who
 The while a sigh his bosom heaves,
 With saddest mien, though formed for joyance, now
 Turning o'er smoothest shoulder his drooped brow,
 O'er which a garland wreathes
 Of lush loose berries and large languid leaves,
 Upon an aged man who hardly breathes,
 Resting at foot of yon sepulchral tree,
 Waiting for Death, bids him a last adieu.

T. C. IRWIN.

LITTLE CONTENT AND THE GRUMBLETONIANS.

PART I.

HUNDREDS, and hundreds, and hundreds
 of years ago, in fact in the dark ages,
 before gas was invented, and when
 spectacles were yet unthought of, there
 lived a certain King Resolute, a brave
 and good king, of a large and valuable territory.
 One portion of this territory was called Grumbletonia.
 Now this Grumbletonia worried King Resolute very
 much indeed. There was not a morning that he did
 not find on his breakfast-table, clumsy and cumber-
 some petitions signed, "Your Majesty's faithful
 Grumbletonians."

They grumbled about the river that ran through
 their town, and wanted his Majesty to have it drained
 off; they grumbled about the roads, and the taxes,
 and the paving and lighting of the town; and, in
 short, they grumbled about everything they could
 think of, and when they had nothing more that they
 could possibly twist into a grievance, they imagined
 evils and grumbled at them.

"By my life," said the king, one morning, when
 his tea was cold, and the milk was floating on the
 top in a thin layer, "by my life, I'll exterminate
 these faithful Grumbletonians,—faithful indeed to
 their name are they. I'll put them all to the edge of
 the sword, and have no more of this." (I forgot to
 mention that his Majesty's toast was rather leathery,
 and his egg as hard as a bullet.)

The king looked so fierce, and spoke so loudly, that
 Little Content, his daughter, who was eating straw-
 berries and cream, opened her eyes, and stared in
 astonishment.

Not that the name of the Grumbletonians was a new

name to her; she had been familiarised to it from
 her infancy; for after her poor mother's death, King
 Resolute would always have his little daughter at
 table with him, and as we said before, not a breakfast
 passed, that the Grumbletonians did not turn up in
 some shape or other.

King Resolute sliced the egg and the toast,
 and cut himself a slice of sirloin. "I'll put an end
 to these rascals, if ——" (the sirloin was good and
 well cooked).

Little Content waited patiently for the rest of the
 sentence.

"If—if some one can't mend their manners for
 them."

In truth they were a bad set, those Grumbletonians.
 Mayor and corporation, butcher and baker, brewer
 and grocer, and their wives and children into the
 bargain, were all alike. The only sounds heard in
 town "from morn till dewy eve" were variations of
 grumble, *grumble*, GRUMBLE.

The people scowled and howled at each other so,
 that you would have taken them for demons rather
 than human beings.

If the weather was hot, their cry was, "Oh dear,
 I never saw such weather as this! It's enough to
 roast anybody alive!"

If it was cold, they cried, "How can we be expected
 to live. It's so cold that people won't come to our
 shops to buy."

If it rained, they said, "All the crops spoiled, as
 sure as I'm a Grumbletonian;" and if the sun was
 fiercely hot, it was, "Ah! all the crops'll be scorched
 up, of course. Just our luck!"

If Mrs. Baker gave her husband mutton for dinner,

he immediately exclaimed, "We never have beef, it's always mutton, mutton, mutton, all the year through."

When Mrs. Butcher made a seed-cake, all the children bawled out, "Oh, ma! we never 'ave no plum-cakes! what a shame!"

When Mr. Baker, on the other hand, requested Mrs. B. to have mutton for dinner, she answered, of course true to her nature, "No, Baker, 'taint convenient; d'ye think a poor 'ard-worked woman's got nothin' to do but attend to your whims and fancies?"

The children were just as quarrelsome, of course; with such examples constantly before them, how could they be otherwise?

If Billy got a top to play with, Sammy immediately called out, "Now, then, Billy, you're always a playing with that there top; just give it to me."

"No, I shan't," returns Billy, "you were a playing with it yerself all day yesterday, and you *always* want what I get. I *never* have anything I want."

Then, of course, there's a fight, and Sammy being the biggest boy, gets the top, and leaves Billy howling with disappointment and rage.

Oh! I can assure you, Grumbletonia was a place to live in. No travellers ever stayed there more than a single night; and, as for organ-grinders, dancing-dogs, and German bands, and Pifferari, they went a mile out of their way, rather than go near the place.

Well, this was the pitch things had reached when King Resolute made up his mind that *something must be done*. The king was in the habit of thinking aloud, and as he sat opposite his little daughter, he spoke his thoughts somewhat in this wise:

"Yes, *something must be done*. Why should I leave such wretches to pollute the earth, and contaminate all who come near them? Grumbling is catching. I never grumbled myself till I had all these petitions. My servants know of them, and they are infected; they boil my eggs too hard, and they cook my toast too much, until my sweet Little Content shows her face to them. Daughter, what is to be done?" continued the king, looking up at the maiden, "happy art thou, O child, that thy fairy godmother endowed thee with a spirit that shall make thee everlastingly happy."

Little Content—a sweet little golden-haired creature of thirteen, had been pondering deeply. She now rose from her chair, and came to her father's side, a child still in years, but a woman, a noble woman, in earnestness and fixity of purpose.

"Father," she said, putting her little hands on his shoulders, "dear father, do you remember the fairy godmother's words?—'Take name and nature of content, and give it whomever you wish.' Be you *content* to let me go amongst these people, and influence them, and turn Grumbletonia into a haven of peace."

King Resolute looked at his daughter long and

lovingly, for she was his only child, the very picture of her dead mother, whom he had loved as woman was never loved before.

"Oh! my sweet Little Content," said he, "wouldst thou fly from thy old father? How can I let thee go, child, from the warm shelter of my heart, to a barbarous place, where thou mayest die in sorrow, in misery, in want, and be never more seen of me?"

"Oh! father, father, father," sighed the little maiden, "be resolute to let me go." She looked sweetly in his face, and he answered her beseeching eyes, with, "Go, child, and the great Master bless thee."

Oh, my! what a bustle there was in the palace that day, to be sure. Every one, from the fat, jolly old housekeeper to the greasy kitchen-maid, was in a state of wonder and amazement.

"Well, I never!" said one, lifting her hands, and opening wide her eyes in astonishment. "Who'd a' thought it?" said another; "fancy our lovely Little Content going off to them grumbling Grumbletonians." "Well, if she makes 'em leave off writing to the king, as never grumbled before, she'll be doing a charity to all on us," sighed the cook, looking anxiously into her stock-pot.

In short, each and all had his or her say, while the subject of their remarks, Little Content, was dressing herself in her very oldest clothes, and tying up her little parcel ready for departure.

We will not attempt to describe the parting between father and child—it was too affecting to be written about. All children, little or big, can imagine what it must be to leave a parent, perhaps for ever, who has always been wonderfully loving, and good, and kind.

But King Resolute was quite willing that Content should go, for he was a good king, and loved his people better than himself, and thought of their welfare more than his own comfort, although he did object to hard-boiled eggs and leathery toast, and in fact, badly-cooked food of any kind, as all men that are worth a straw do.

So Little Content set out, followed by the blessings of all the household, who had wondered so much at her departure; but as she shook hands with each one in the great entrance-hall of the palace, she left a sure content in each heart, that glowed in their eyes, and trembled on their lips, as they wished her good speed and success.

Her father looked after her with a loving smile of approval, as she tripped lightly down the marble steps, for he knew that hers was a good mission, and the tears that he shed were more for joy that he had such a daughter, than for sorrow at her departure.

The roads were very smooth and well-made for a long distance round the King's palace, and Little Content tripped merrily along, singing like a nightingale, and stopping every now and then to pluck a

bright blossom from the hedge-row, or to cool her dusty feet in the water of a river that babbled and brawled over huge boulders by the road-side. By-and-by, when the sun got very hot, and there was no shade in the glaring white road, the little maiden entered the wood, and sat under an oak-tree to eat her dinner. She knew the language of the birds, and she called them to her to pick up the crumbs that she dropped. Sparrows and yellowhammers in myriads, and one little robin, came at her call, and it was a very pretty sight indeed to see the girl with her golden hair falling round her like a glory, her bare arms, and hands, and feet, as white as warmly-tinted ivory, with the birds caressing her and feeding alternately. Such sweet singing surely was never heard before as the chorus that they sang, led by Little Content.

The song finished, Little Content wished the birds good-bye, and started afresh on her journey, rested and refreshed by her stay under the tree, and the good bread and honey she brought from home.

But now the road became very rugged indeed, sharp stones pierced the child's tender feet, huge brambles stretched across the road, and she had to scramble through them, tearing her delicate arms and hands in a frightful manner. But the child still felt light-hearted; she had the sweet peace in her soul that a clear conscience and a contented mind give, and she looked up and sang—

Praise to the Master of Earth and Heaven.

A bird answered from a tree, and the little maiden felt the sweet comfort of sympathy.

On and on, ever rougher and more tedious became the way, ever darker and darker, till the sun set in a sea of red, and the large mountains of black cloud that half hid the horizon were tipped with it as with fire, and in the east a little silvery cloud rose, and gradually the bright moon appeared, peering curiously to see if the sun had done his work and gone to bed; and the moon looked lovingly upon the little maiden, and lighted her face till it looked like the face of an angel, and she went on her way more swiftly, singing with the melody of a full and grateful heart—

Praise to the Master of Earth and Heaven.

Soon Little Content saw in the distance the town of Grumbletonia. Little twinkling dismal lights here and there, announced to her that she was approaching it, and the maiden quickened her steps and hastened onwards. She entered Grumbletonia and walked down its principal street, looking about her as she went, still singing, still true to her name, although her feet were as sore as little feet could be, and her arms and hands were in a woeful plight. Two men were quarrelling in the middle of the road, as Little Content passed; and her voice was so sweet, and her words so strange, that one of them

turned to look at her. Then he left his companion, and followed her.

"What were you singing, little girl?" said he; "sing it again."

Little Content sang again.

"Well, you are a strange girl," said the man, "singing praises for torn feet and bruised hands."

"My hands are scratched; it is true," answered Little Content, "and my feet are sore with walking; but I have no broken bones. I can see the beautiful moon, I can smell the sweet scent of the flowers, I can hear the thousand songs of Nature, and I have a voice to praise the Creator of all."

"You are a strange child," replied the man. "Come home to my house, and I will give you a lodging; you are poor and alone, and must have come a long way to-day. Here, put your hand in my arm," he continued, "and never mind if you lean all your weight upon it, you are but a slight thing."

And Little Content walked by the side of the Grumbletonian, and talked to him, and taught him her song of praise; and walking and talking, they came to his house.

He was the mayor of the town, and a very great man. It was under his orders that all the principal petitions were written; not that he was so much to blame as his wife, who worried him till he was almost mad, if he did not do what she wished, and grumbled in a very high key from morning till night, in fact Mrs. Mayor was the most accomplished grumbler in all Grumbletonia, and that is saying a great deal. When the great man's house was reached, he said to Little Content, in rather a frightened tone, "Now you must wait out here, while I go in and tell Mrs. Mayor that I have invited you to sleep here."

"Thank you," said Little Content; and she sat on the lowest doorstep and began her song again. Soon she heard violent talking from the house. If she had been inside she would have heard Mrs. Mayor say, "Well, of all the fools in creation, I think you are the most idiotic. Haven't we servants and people enough in the house now, to worry me out of my life? But there, that's just like you—you are the most selfish, horrid, unkind man that ever could have been heard of or thought of;" then Mrs. Mayor began to cry.

"Poor little thing," said Mr. Mayor, in an imploring tone, "she's scratched and bruised frightfully, and so weary, that if she were not the bravest-hearted little creature in the world, she would die of fatigue. Hark at her now!"

Outside the window, in the clear, cold moonlight, rose the voice of the child, loud, full, and sweet.

"Well, she may come in, if you like!" Not very gracious, but it was a step in the right direction.

(To be concluded in our next.)